

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 SP-02 PRS-01 L-01 RSC-01

/033 W

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R 311712Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7819

INFO AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 15130

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MT, VT

SUBJECT: VATICAN AND THE MALTESE CONSTITUTION

REF: A) VALLETTA 1674; B) ROME 11981

1. VATICAN'S DESK OFFICER FOR MALTA INFORMED US OCT. 31 THAT ARCHBISHOP GONZI WAS VISITING A DOCTOR FRIEND IN CATANIA AND PROBABLY WILL ARRIVE ROME TODAY. DESK OFFICER REAFFIRMED WHAT WAS REPORTED IN REFTEL B, THAT SINCE QUESTION OF MODIFYING MALTESE CONSTITUTION ENTIRELY DOMESTIC MALTESE MATTER VATICAN HAS NEVER PLACED ITSELF IN POSITION OF "SANCTIONING" CONSTITUTIONAL MODIFICATIONS WHICH MINTOFF GOVERNMENT INTENDS. VATICAN UNHAPPY THAT MINTOFF HAS BEEN ALLUDING TO VATICAN APPROVAL OF THESE CHANGES, BUT DISMISSES MATTER AS SIMPLY A "PECULARITY OF MINTOFF'S PERSONAL STYLE". SOURCE SAID MINTOFF HAS RECENTLY ALLUDED TO VATICAN'S RESCINDING OF EXCOMMUNICATION OF PERSONS WHO SUPPORTED MALTESE LABOR PARTY. THIS ALSO IS GROSS INACCURACY SINCE CHURCH IN PAST HAD ONLY GRAVELY CAUTIONED CATHOLICS AGAINST VOTING FOR LABOR PARTY. SOURCE OBSERVED THAT VATICAN MOST ANXIOUS TO SEE MALTESE CHURCH DIVEST ITSELF OF THESE ANACHRONISTIC PRACTICES OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND COERSION, AND BECOME A TRULY POST-CONCILIAR CHURCH, A DESIRE WITH WHICH MINTOFF HEARTILY AGREES.

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2. SOURCE SAID THAT IN ALL FRANKNESS ONE CANNOT ATTACH TOO MUCH

IMPORTANCE TO STATEMENTS WHICH ARCHBISHOP GONZI AT 90 MIGHT MAKE CONCERNING HIS UNDERSTANDING OF AUGUST MEETING BETWEEN MINTOFF AND VATICAN AUTHORITIES. GONZI AND MINTOFF ALSO HAD EXTREMELY FRIENDLY DISCUSSIONS IN ROME AND, SOURCE SAID, THERE NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER THAT GONZI UNDERSTOOD FULLY WHAT MINTOFF HOPES TO DO IN WAY OF MODIFYING CONSTITUTION AND, MOREOVER, GONZI FOUND NO ASPECTS OF THESE CHANGES WITH WHICH HE HAD SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT. IN ADDITION TO ARCHBISHOP'S FORGETFULNESS ON THIS AND OTHER SUBJECTS, SOURCE SAID GONZI MAY VERY WELL AT TIMES FALL UNDER INFLUENCE OF RIGHT-WING MALTESE CLERGY WHO APPREHENSIVE OF ANY DIMINUTION OF THEIR TRADITIONAL POWER AND INFLUENCE IN MALTESE SOCIETY. THESE CHURCHMEN DEFINITELY IN MINORITY, AND THEIR IDEAS SHARPLY CONTRAST WITH THOSE OF YOUNGER CLERGY. CONSERVATIVE CLERICS ALSO FEAR CURTAILMENT OF THEIR ECONOMIC POSITION AS WELL AS POLITICAL INFLUENCE.

3. SOURCE DID NOT FORSEE ANY DIFFICULTY WHEN TIME COMES IN IMPLEMENTING CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS DEFINITELY NOT VERY DRASTIC IN NATURE OR SCOPE. ADDITIONALLY, HE FELT IT FUTILE FOR VATICAN TO ATTEMPT PLACE ANY PRESSURE ON GONZI SINCE ARCHBISHOP NOT FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS ACTIONS. IN THIS CONTEXT, SOURCE REITERATED DESIRABILITY OF GONZI'S RETIREMENT. HOWEVER, HE THOUGHT IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO WAIT A BIT LONGER UNTIL NEW AUXILIARY BISHOP HAS MORE EXPERIENCE BEFORE HE COULD ASSUME ARCHDIOCESE. VOLPE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CATHOLICS, CLERGYMEN, CHURCH STATE RELATIONS, MEETINGS, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: boyleja
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974ROME15130
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740312-0429
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974102/aaaaabpx.tel
Line Count: 86
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: A) VALLETTA 1674; B) ROME 11981
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: boyleja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 MAY 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 MAY 2002 by martinml>; APPROVED <12 MAR 2003 by boyleja>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VATICAN AND THE MALTESE CONSTITUTION
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MT, VT, (GONZI, ARCHBISHOP)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005